

**WASHINGTON** - U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today called on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to explain recent media reports indicating that upwards of 1,800 veterans may have been exposed to several potentially deadly viruses, including HIV, after they received dental treatment at the St. Louis VA Medical Center.

"It's deeply disturbing that our veterans were exposed to that type of risk," Mitchell said. "This is unacceptable, and I'm outraged at the thought of them having to worry about the possibility of being infected. The VA has some serious explaining to do."

According to reports, the center "may have exposed more than 1,800 veterans to HIV and other life-threatening diseases due to improperly cleaned dental instruments." [Source: [CBS News](#), June 30, 2010]

Mitchell, Chairman of the U.S. House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, last year demanded answers from VA when he learned that veteran cancer patients were given incorrect radiation doses and botched prostate cancer treatments at the VA Medical Center in Philadelphia.

Mitchell also chaired a subcommittee hearing after reports surfaced of errors in endoscopic treatment, including colonoscopies and other minimally invasive procedures were identified as widespread throughout the entire VA healthcare system, including the Murfreesboro, Tennessee VA facility.

In a letter to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki today, Mitchell wrote, "I request a full accounting about the problems that these patients at the St. Louis VA Medical Center are encountering and what the VA is doing to solve them. I would also like to know how, specifically, the VA proposes to improve its oversight to ensure that medical instruments are properly sterilized."

Below is the text of Mitchell's letter to Secretary Shinseki.

June 30, 2010

**VIA FACSIMILE**

Hon. Secretary Eric K. Shinseki

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

I am seriously concerned about a recent media reports indicating upwards of 1,800 veterans may have been exposed to several potentially deadly viruses, including HIV, after they received dental treatment at the St. Louis VA Medical Center.

Specifically, CBS News reported that the center, "may have exposed more than 1,800 veterans to HIV and other life-threatening diseases due to improperly cleaned dental instruments."

[Source: [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504763\\_162-20009259-10391704.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504763_162-20009259-10391704.html) ]

This is deeply disturbing.

As you know, sadly, this is not the first time a VA medical facility has mistreated veterans. Last year, we learned that veteran cancer patients were given incorrect radiation doses and botched prostate cancer treatments at the VA Medical Center in Philadelphia.

Also last year, we learned about errors in endoscopic treatment, including colonoscopies and other minimally invasive were identified to be widespread throughout the entire VA healthcare system, including egregious errors at the Murfreesboro, Tennessee VA facility.

To say this is unacceptable would be an understatement.

I request a full accounting about the problems that these patients at the St. Louis VA Medical Center are encountering and what the VA is doing to solve them. I would also like to know how, specifically, the VA proposes to improve its oversight to ensure that medical instruments are properly sterilized.

As you can imagine, I consider this matter urgent.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Harry E. Mitchell

Chairman

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

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